DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 580 UD 009 527

AUTHOR	FRANKEL, EDWARD
TITLE	ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE TO STRENGTHEN HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROGRAMS. EVALUATION OF STATE URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK CITY 1968-69.
INSTITUTION	CENTER FOR URBAN EDUCATION, NEW YORK, N.Y. EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COMMITTEE.
SPONS AGENCY	NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION, BROOKLYN, N.Y.
REPORT NO	ERC-E003E
PUB DATE	SEP 69
NOTE	46P.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$2.40
DESCRIPTORS	ATTENDANCE, *ATTENDANCE SERVICES, DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, NIGHT SCHOOLS, OCCUPATIONAL GUIDANCE, PARENT PARTICIPATION, PROGRAM EVALUATION, QUESTIONNAIRES, *URBAN SCHOOLS
IDENTIFIERS	*NEW YORK CITY

ABSTRACT

THIS REPORT EVALUATES A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT ATTEMPTED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS IN 1969 WHICH WAS DESIGNED TO REMEDIATE ABSENTEEISM IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS. THE PROJECT WAS TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALIZED ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATED SERVICES FOR 16-YEAR-OLD AND OLDER CHRONIC ABSENTEES AND THEIR PARENTS. OTHER OBJECTIVES INCLUDED THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REFERRAL SERVICE FOR JOB COUNSELING AND EVENING EDUCATION PROGRAMS, AND ASSISTANCE TO PRINCIPALS WITH THEIR SCHOOL REGISTERS. THE EVALUATION DESIGN WAS BASED ON: (1) COMPARISONS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RECORDS BEFORE AND AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT; (2) SURVEYS OF OPINIONS ABOUT THE REASONS FOR CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM; AND, (3) ASSESSMENT OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PROJECT. THE DATA WERE GATHERED THROUGH INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FORMS USED ARE INCLUDED. (KG)

ED036580

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

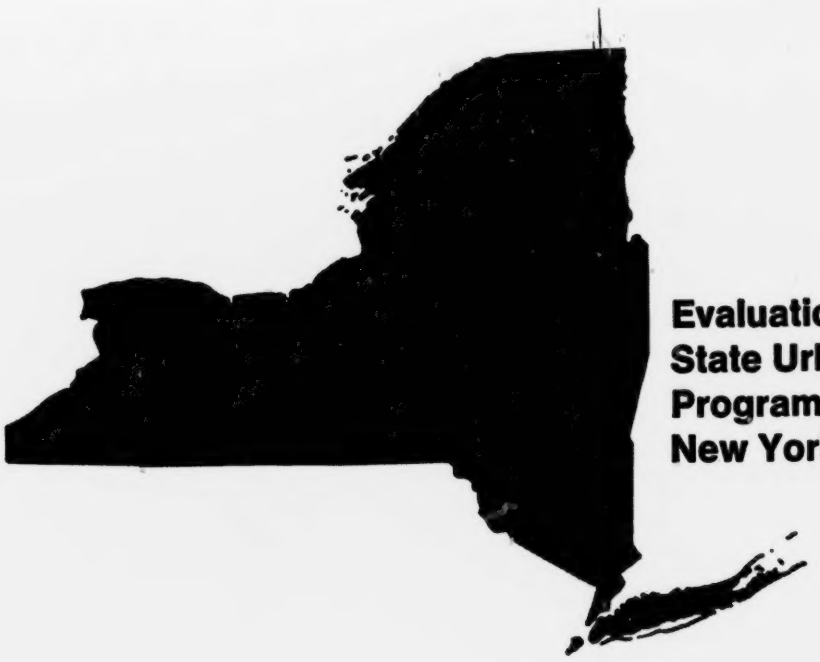
09527 E

Project No. SA-0469

ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE TO STRENGTHEN HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROGRAMS

by Edward Frankel

September 1969



Evaluation of
State Urban Education
Programs in
New York City 1968-69

UD 009 527

The Center for Urban Education
105 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10016

ED036580

Center for Urban Education
Educational Research Committee
State Urban Education Program Evaluation

ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE TO STRENGTHEN HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROGRAMS

Edward Frankel

Evaluation of a New York City school district educational project funded under the New York State Urban Education Program (Chapter 685, Section 9, Subdivision 12, Laws of 1968, New York State Legislature), performed under contract with the Board of Education of the City of New York.

September 1969

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Attendance Task Force project, an example of "crisis intervention" applied to the problem of the school dropout, was a three-month experimental project in one high school proposed and implemented by the Bureau of Attendance of the Board of Education of New York City.

The time available for the evaluation was one month. The study included an assessment of the work of the Task Force personnel and its effects upon the school attendance of chronic absentees over 16 years old.

The evaluation of the Attendance Task Force project could not have been done without the complete cooperation of the Bureau of Attendance, the Task Force personnel, and the staff members of John Adams High School. The contributions of the following people are also gratefully acknowledged: Dr. J. Wayne Wrightstone, Assistant Superintendent; Dr. Samuel D. McClelland, Acting Director of the Bureau of Education Research; Mr. Stanley Berger of the Bureau of Attendance; and Mr. Thomas McNerney, Attendance Task Force Project Director.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	1
	INTRODUCTION	1
	THE ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE PROJECT . . .	2
	The Attendance Task Force	3
	Evaluation Design	4
II	FINDINGS.	6
	JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL	6
	Overview.	6
	Ethnic Composition and Attendance . .	7
	School Attendance Staff	9
	ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE	10
	Attendance Community Workers . . .	10
	Attendance Teachers	13
	OUTCOMES OF ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES	15
	Disposition of the Chronic Absentees. .	15
	SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND DISCHARGES BEFORE AND AFTER TASK FORCE INTERVENTION	16
	Attendance Rate for a Sample of Chronic Absentees	17
	Student Discharges	20
	POSSIBLE CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM . .	21
	Opinions of Task Force Personnel. . .	21
	Opinions of Regular School Personnel .	22
	ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT	23
III	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25
	APPENDIX A TABLES (Included in text)	
	APPENDIX B INSTRUMENTS	
	APPENDIX C STAFF LIST	

CHAPTER I

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

A major concern in the high schools today is the increasing numbers of students 16 years old and older who are chronically absent from school. These students generally drop out of school, and often fail to secure employment. Almost any high school in New York City has on its register hundreds of such boys and girls.

The severity of this problem is reflected in the number of students discharged from high school during the 1967-68 school year. According to the October 31, 1967 school census for 1967-68, there were approximately 230,000 students enrolled in the City's academic high schools.[1] During the 1967-68 school year a total of 36,000 students, approximately 10 percent of the total number enrolled, were discharged before graduation. The dropout rate was even higher in the vocational high schools (13.7 percent).[2]

At 16 a student may leave school upon presentation of an employment certificate. At age 17, inasmuch as schooling is no longer compulsory, a student can legally leave school. For 1967-68, approximately two-thirds of the students who were discharged from the registers voluntarily left school -- dropped out.

---

[1]Board of Education of the City of New York, Special Census of School Population, Bureau of Educational Program Research and Statistics, February 1968.

[2]Board of Education of the City of New York, Bureau of Attendance, Pupils Discharged, School Year September 1966 to June 1967, Tables NA & 15B.

THE ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE PROJECT

The Attendance Task Force project was designed to provide individualized and concentrated services for 16-year-old and older chronic absentees and their parents for the purpose of returning the students to school promptly and encouraging them to remain in school on an uninterrupted and meaningful basis. This demonstration project, attempted this year for the first time in New York City's schools, was financed by the New York State Urban Education program.

The project was introduced experimentally in John Adams High School for a three-month period, April 14 to June 27, 1969. It was hoped that there would be sufficient reduction of attendance problems of older students so that the regular school attendance staff could cope with them. The Attendance Task Force would then move to other high schools. The proposal indicated that should the program prove successful, it might be replicated throughout the school system, with several task forces on borough-wide bases.

The stated objectives of the Task Force projects were:

1. To concentrate attendance services in disadvantaged areas where standard services are inadequate;

2. To encourage prompt return to school of absentees who were previously not reached by attendance services;

3. To develop a referral service for job counseling and evening education programs for children who are receiving neither education nor occupational training;

4. To make school registers more accurate indicators of the school populations; and

5. To assist principals to program more realistically and more meaningfully in terms of their actual, not paper registers.

The Attendance Task Force

The basic approach of this project was to establish personal contact with the chronic absentee and his parents. The Attendance Task Force was to consist of 25 Community Liaison Trainees (called Attendance Community Workers), 5 Attendance Teachers, and a District Supervisory Officer. The basic unit was planned to consist of five Community Workers and one Attendance Teacher, working as a team, the Community Workers establishing contact with the student and his parents, and the Attendance Teacher interviewing the students and parents and helping plan for the prompt return of the student to school. These planning conferences were to be conducted in school or in the home. Boys and girls on the school register who had attained their 16th birthday by April 14, 1969, and who were identified as chronic absentees on the basis of either their school records or by the regular school attendance staff were to be served by the Attendance Task Force.

Preliminary screening of the roll books by Task Force personnel revealed over 1,100 chronic absentees -- students who had accumulated at least 30 days of absence during the current or previous school year, students with extended unexplained absences, and students referred by the school attendance teacher. Of these chronic absentees, 526, who were over 16 years old, were selected for attention by the Task Force.

Complete cooperation of all school personnel was regarded as an essential ingredient in this return-to-school program. The school principal, guidance counselors, deans, program assistants, school health officers, homeroom and subject teachers were key people in the

readjustment process. It was hoped that conferences with these personnel would bridge the gaps between the school, the home, and the student. All programs within the Board of Education and the City of New York would be utilized to further this end. Followup reviews of the students' attendance after their return to school were to continue while the Task Force remained in the school.

In order to conserve the efforts of the Task Force, letters would be used to locate the chronic absentees over 17 years of age. Even though school attendance is not compulsory for these students, an effort was to be made to get them to return to school. If the student failed to cooperate, he was to be discharged from the school register. If parents asked for the discharge of a 17-year-old or older student, the discharge was granted.

Evaluation Design

Since the project was initiated on April 14 and the evaluation was not undertaken until May 1969, the present evaluation was limited to determining the effectiveness of the Attendance Task Force operation. Specifically the evaluators sought to assess the extent to which the personnel aspects of the Task Force were implemented, and the degree to which the project resulted in better school attendance of the chronic absentees.

The evaluation covered five areas:

1. A description of the attendance problems at John Adams High School. This information was obtained from school records and from conferences with the principal and with the regular school attendance staff.

2. An analysis of the composition and activities of the Attendance Task Force personnel. This material was based on questionnaires completed by the Task Force personnel, and from daily report forms kept by the Task Force to record their daily activities and notes concerning their interviews with chronic absentees and their parents. (See Appendix B for copy of the questionnaire.)

3. A comparison of the attendance rates of a selected sample of chronic absentees before and after Task Force intervention.

4. An examination of the possible causes of chronic absenteeism based on the opinions of Task Force and school personnel; and

5. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the project as reported by the school personnel and Task Force personnel in interview and by questionnaire. (See Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire.)

In addition, the evaluators met with representatives of the Bureau of Attendance, who initiated and implemented the project, and held conferences with the Task Force supervisory personnel.

CHAPTER II

FINDINGS

JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL

Overview

John Adams is an academic high school housed in a 40 year old building which is currently undergoing modernization. It includes an annex which accommodates about 1,000 ninth graders. The total population of the school is about 5,000, about 70 percent of whom are white and 30 percent black with a very few Puerto Ricans. The school is overutilized, and operates a 12-period day, from 7:50 A.M. to 5:01 P.M.

The curriculum is basically that found in most academic high schools; courses are offered at various ability levels ranging from honors classes to special remedial classes. A student may follow an academic, a commercial, or a general track. Of the June 1969 graduating class, approximately 40 percent earned academic diplomas, 40 percent general diplomas, and 20 percent earned commercial diplomas. About one-third of the graduates continue their education beyond high school, mainly in technical schools and community colleges and the remainder, about 15 percent of the total population, go on to a four year academic college.

The school was rezoned in September 1967, adding a noncontiguous black ghetto neighborhood to the previous contiguous lower-middle-class white and lower-middle-class black communities.

John Adams was selected as the experimental school for the Attendance Task Force project because it had a high percentage of daily absences; a growing number of chronic absentees who could not be served

by the regular school attendance staff; a school zone which encompassed disadvantaged neighborhoods; space and facilities for accommodating the Task Force personnel; and a principal and staff that were receptive to the objectives of the project.

Ethnic Composition and Attendance

The ethnic composition of the school has been remarkably constant over the past four years. As can be seen in Table II-1 below, about 30 percent of the students are black, there is a small number of Puerto Ricans, and a large percentage of "others." (The ethnic data were supplied by the Administrative Assistant of John Adams High School.)

TABLE II-1

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL

	School Year							
	1965-66		1966-67		1967-68		1968-69	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Puerto Rican	89	1.9	356	7.3	89	1.7	117	2.2
Negro	1327	27.9	1271	26.1	1427	28.0	1455	27.8
Other	3336	70.2	3240	66.6	3588	70.3	3636[a]	70.0
Total	4752	100.0	4867	100.0	5104	100.0	5208	100.0

[a]These data include 23 Orientals, 1 American Indian and 40 other Spanish-speaking students.

TABLE II-2

ATTENDANCE BY PERCENTAGES IN JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL AND CITYWIDE

	1965-66	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69
John Adams	83.2	80.2	77.9	73.3[a]
Citywide	80.4	80.1	77.1	Not Available
Difference H.S.-Citywide	+ 2.8	+ 0.1	+ 0.8	

[a]The 1968-69 attendance percentage was an estimate based upon attendance from attendance periods four through eight. The first three periods were omitted in this calculation since the teachers strike took place during this time and the attendance figures were not an accurate reflection of student attendance.

Changes in school zoning two years ago did not affect the ethnic composition of the school to any great extent. However, according to the administrative assistant of the high school, the socioeconomic level of the incoming black students was lower than that of the black group that was transferred to another school district as part of the rezoning.

As can be seen in Table II-2 there has been a continuous decline in attendance at John Adams as well as citywide. Over the past four years, attendance at this high school has dropped by almost 10 percent, from about 83 to 73 percent. According to the school staff, the communities served by this high school do not seem to place a premium on daily attendance. Absenteeism is high for the students from the black

and the white lower-middle-class neighborhoods. Students from the black ghetto area are the most disadvantaged economically and educationally. These students exhibit the poorest achievement and contribute the largest number of chronic absentees.

School Attendance Staff

Before the entrance of the Attendance Task Force, the attendance problems at John Adams was handled by an attendance teacher, two attendance coordinators, and a secretary.

The two attendance coordinators are teachers assigned on a part-time basis, one to grade 10, and the other to grades 9, 11, and 12. They check all unexcused absences by phone calls or postcards to the home and refer excessive absences to the attendance teacher. With the advent of the Task Force, the work of the school's attendance coordinators was to be reduced; they were to confine their efforts to handling the routine absences of students younger than 16 years of age.

Interviews held with the school's attendance teacher revealed that he has been in this school for 12 years. He follows up all referrals by the attendance coordinators of all unexplained absences of five consecutive days. He receives an average of ten referrals a day and makes 15 house calls each week, in addition to phone calls and letters.

The rates of absence and referrals has increased steadily over the past few years and have reached such proportions as to make it impossible for him to deal with the caseload. Between September 1968 and January 1969, there were 350 referrals. The attendance teacher believes that of the 20 percent absent daily from school, one half can be considered chronic absentees. The attendance teacher felt that the arrival of the Attendance Task Force was most fortunate.

ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE

Although the project proposal called for 25 Attendance Community Workers, 5 Attendance Teachers, and a Supervising Attendance Officer, the actual Task Force started with 16 Community Workers, 5 Attendance Teachers, and a project supervisor. The reduction in Community Workers was the result of several factors, one of which was the limited space assigned in the school for the operation of the project. The decision was made that a ratio of three Community Workers to one Attendance Teacher was more realistic than the five to one ratio originally proposed.

Attendance Community Workers

In the questionnaire addressed to the Community Workers, and in the personal interviews which followed, an attempt was made to examine the backgrounds of these community liaison trainees and to determine the extent to which they were functioning as originally conceived in the proposal.

There were eight male and five female Community Workers who completed questionnaires. Two of the 16 Community Workers resigned before the termination of the project; another was ill and could not be reached. The information presented in this section is based on the responses of 13 Community Workers.

All respondents were Negro; except for two men, all were married. Most of the men were high school graduates and all of the women had

completed the first year of college. They had various background experience. Except for one housewife, all of the women had worked as school aides or family assistants. Most of the males had relevant experiences such as community and group workers and tutors.

The Attendance Community Workers performed administrative and clerical chores as well as making home visits. While all of them were involved in home visits, the bulk of their time was spent with the attendance teachers in identifying the absentees, and in reviewing their records. The Community Workers were responsible for checking the daily attendance of those students identified as chronic absentees, and for recording the attendance of these students on special project record reports. The female Community Workers were assigned the clerical and secretarial tasks; they performed such duties as serving as switchboard operators and recording the daily attendance of the chronic absentees under supervision by the attendance teacher.

A major activity of the Community Workers was contacting chronic absentees and their parents, by letter, by telephone, and by home visits. Telephone calls and letters were not as effective as home visits in establishing personal contacts with the students and their parents. However, it required 1,260 home visits to see 410 of the 526 chronic absentees selected. About 150 of them were contacted on the first home visit; it was necessary to make several visits at different days and times to contact the others. The remaining ones were contacted by letter and telephone. The major purpose of the contact was to explain the project to the student and his parents, and to arrange for a planning conference with the Task Force Attendance Teacher in the school.

The eight male community workers carried an average caseload of 45 students, whereas the females, making home visits in pairs, shared an average caseload of 15 chronic absentees. These women were also responsible for the administrative duties necessary for the proper functioning of the project. The data are summarized in Table II-3.

TABLE II-3

ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNITY WORKERS
ON ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE PROJECT

Activity	Total Numbers Workers	Students	Man Days
Identifying chronic absentees from roll book	8	1325	38
Reviewing students' cumulative record and health card	9	500	38
Writing letters to chronic absentees	8	67	2.5
Telephone calls to chronic absentees	8	67	1.5
Home visits to chronic absentees -- Total No. visits, 1260	13	410	18.3
Letters to chronic absentees 17+	5	21	1
Other Activities			
a) Escort field worker--women in pairs	5		26
b) Clerical work on problem cases	5		23
c) Daily attendance check	3		5 hr./da.
d) Answering switchboard	4		21
e) Conferences with Attendance Teacher	13		46 days
f) Record keeping	13		1 hr./da.
g) Orientation Conference	13		13

Attendance Teachers

The two women and three men assigned to the project as Attendance Teachers were regularly licensed personnel. They had an average of 14 years experience as attendance teachers, and had worked with high-school-age disadvantaged students. With one exception they held a master's degree in social work, and had some experience in group and individual counseling.

The Attendance Teachers were to be responsible for identifying the chronic absentees, for interviewing them and their parents either in school or in the home, for encouraging a prompt and meaningful return to school, and for conducting followup conferences with the students and staff of the school after the student returned.

The nature of the activities performed by the Attendance Teachers was ascertained by questionnaire. In general, their reported duties were similar to the duties proposed; one female Attendance Teacher was assigned as an assistant to the project supervisor, and was called the project coordinator.

The four Attendance Teachers reported that they spent most of their time conducting school conferences with chronic absentees and their parents. They saw 423 chronic absentees and their parents in school. The Attendance Teachers made only two home visits. They held personal followup conferences with 70 students who returned to school, and conferences with the grade advisors of 67 of them.

The Attendance Teachers spent some time in guiding the Community Workers in the identification of the chronic absentees, and held periodic

conferences with the three trainees with whom they worked. They spent a part of this time in writing letters, telephoning, planning, and contacting school personnel and outside agencies including counseling centers, juvenile courts, and community service societies.

These data are summarized in Table II-4.

TABLE II-4

ANALYSIS OF ATTENDANCE TEACHER ACTIVITY
ON ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE PROJECT

Activity	A. T.	Total Numbers Students	Man Days
Identifying chronic absentees from roll book	3	240	10
Writing letters to chronic absentees	2	53	2
Telephone calls to chronic absentees	5	128	7½
Home visits to chronic absentees	2	2	5
School conferences with chronic absentees and their parents	5	423	89
Conferences with returnees	5	70	2
Conferences with school personnel	4	67	4
Followup conferences with parents	3	21	5
Other Activities			
a) Conferences with Community Workers	5	143	18
b) Annual conference	4		4
c) Evaluation	5		8
d) Planning with District Office Supervisor	5		5
e) Record keeping	5		14

OUTCOMES OF ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES

Disposition of the Chronic Absentees

For the purpose of this project, a chronic absentee is defined as a student who had accumulated at least 30 days of absence during the current or previous school year, a student with extended unexplained absence, and a student referred to the Attendance Task Force by the school attendance teacher.

During the September 1968 school year, 1,118 students at John Adams High School were identified as chronic absentees by the Task Force. Of these, 526 were 16 years old or older. These 526 constituted the population on which the Task Force concentrated its efforts.

A summary of the outcomes for the 526 chronic absentees selected by the Task Force showed the following: for 423, or 80 percent, a final disposition was reached; the Task Force carried 325 chronic absentees as cases under supervision, having made contact with their parents, and the remaining 98 were discharged from school. Of the latter 98 cases, 52 were over 17 years old and therefore were not legally required to finish high school; 19 were 16 years old or older but had employment certificates and 27 were discharged from this high school for a variety of reasons including transfers to other schools and medical disabilities. There were 103 students (20 percent of the 526) for whom a final disposition was not reached during the three-month period of the project's operation 75 were pending since no contact could be made with

them; 18 were unassigned because no home or school conference time could be arranged; and 10 were classified in a miscellaneous category. These results are summarized in Table II-5 below.

TABLE II-5

DISPOSITION OF CHRONIC ABSENTEES IDENTIFIED BY ATTENDANCE TASK FORCE PROJECT

Total school population	5208		
Total number of chronic absentees	1118		
Number of chronic absentees 16 years and over	526		
		N	%
Total number of chronic absentees 16 years and over		526	100.0
Chronic absentees contacted		325	61.8
Unable to contact		75	14.3
Unable to arrange conference		18	3.4
Miscellaneous		10	1.9
Discharged from school*		98	18.6

*Of those discharged 52 were over 17 years and not legally required to finish high school; 19 had employment certificates; and 27 were transferred to other schools or discharged for other reasons including medical disabilities.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND DISCHARGES BEFORE AND AFTER TASK FORCE INTERVENTION

Although identification and attendance data were available for the 526 chronic absentees selected by the Task Force, complete information was recorded only for the 325 students they carried under supervision.

From these 325 students, a sample of 100 was selected for in-depth analysis of school attendance, before and after Task Force intervention.

Of the 100 students in the sample, 59 were over 17 years of age and 41 were between the ages of 16 and 17; 53 were male; and 49 were in grade 10, 45 in grade 11, and the remaining 6 were in the 12th grade. Of the sample group, 34 were Negro and 66 were "other"; there were no Puerto Ricans. The sample selected was not significantly different from the students not selected with respect to age, sex, grade in school and ethnic composition.

Attendance Rates for a Sample of Chronic Absentees

The rates of attendance for the 100 students in the sample were calculated for the period prior to Task Force intervention, for the period after Task Force intervention, and for the entire 1968-69 school year. In addition, the attendance rate for these same students for 1967-68 was obtained. These rates are presented in Table II-6 below.

TABLE II-6

COMPARISON OF ATTENDANCE RATES FOR CHRONIC ABSENTEES BEFORE AND AFTER TASK FORCE INTERVENTION

	1968-69			1967-68
	Before Intervention	After Intervention[a]	Total Year	Total Year
N days	101	27.8	129	172
N days attended	59.1	20.5	79.6	125.7
Percent Attendance	59.1	73.9	61.8	73.1

[a]The number of days in the period following Task Force intervention varied from 7 to 45 for each student; the average number of days in the period was 27.8.

The period from September 8, 1968 to April 18, 1969 was defined as the period prior to identification by the Task Force; there were 101 school days in this period not counting 35 days of teachers' strike. The period between the date of the interview with the Task Force Attendance Teacher (sometime between April 21 and June 12), and the last day for which attendance was recorded for the project (June 20, 1969), was defined as the period after intervention. This period varied for each student from 7 to 45 days, depending on the date of the interview. The average number of days in this period, for all the students combined, averaged 27.8.

As can be seen in Table II-6 the average attendance rate for the 100 chronic absentees increased from approximately 59 percent in the

period before Task Force intervention to 74 percent in the period following Task Force intervention. This 15 percent increase is a significant improvement.

The reader should keep in mind that with increasing age, attendance rates can be expected to decrease, especially in a group of chronic absentees. For the entire 1967-68 school year, these 100 students averaged 73 percent attendance; for this year (1968-69), they averaged 62 percent. Thus, although they were a year older, the 74 percent attendance rate for the post contact period this year equalled their average rate last year and bettered their average rate this year.

In considering past attendance rates for this high school, the rezoning of two years ago must be kept in mind. For the entire high school, the attendance rates for the seventh and eighth attendance reporting periods has progressively worsened over the past four years. The average rate in 1965-66 was approximately 79 percent; in 1966-67 it fell to about 75 percent; in 1967-68 it was 73 percent, and for this current 1968-69 school year, the attendance rate in the seventh and eighth periods was approximately 71 percent for the entire high school. This latter figure is slightly lower than the sample result of 74 percent for the post-contact period. More refined data would be necessary in order to attribute this slight difference unequivocally to Task Force intervention.

Student Discharges

An analysis of student discharges from John Adams High School during the seventh and eighth attendance periods, a time span which corresponds almost exactly with the span of the Task Force operation, was tabulated for the years 1965-66 through 1968-69 and is presented in Table II-7 below.

TABLE II-7

STUDENT DISCHARGES FROM SCHOOL DURING THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH ATTENDANCE PERIODS

	1965-66 to 1968-69 School Year, Attendance Periods 7 and 8							
Reasons for Student Discharges	1965-66		1966-67		1967-68		1968-69	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Employment Cert.	15	15.5	19	13.3	29	20.3	20	17.8
Aged 17 & Older	43	44.3	80	56.0	65	45.4	47	42.0
All Other Reasons	39	40.2	44	30.7	49	34.3	45	40.2
Total Discharges:	97	100.0	143	100.0	143	100.0	112	100.0

Discharges were tabulated by "reason for discharge" using categories employed by the Bureau of Attendance: those 16 years of age who had obtained an employment certificate; those 17 years old or older for whom schooling is no longer compulsory; and all other students who have been discharged from the roll books because of transfers to other schools in or out of the city, marriage, mental or physical disability, non-locatable, and the like.

The total number discharged this year was significantly fewer than the number discharged in the two previous years, but not significantly more than the number discharged in 1965-66. There seems to be some indication that the number of students discharged who are 17 years old or older may be decreasing. However, it is not possible to determine the extent to which this trend reflects the efforts of the Task Force; additional data would be necessary for this important analysis.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Project personnel and school personnel were asked their opinions as to the possible causes of student chronic absenteeism. Their opinions are reported in the following section.

Opinions of Task Force Personnel

The Attendance Teachers in interviews said that in their experiences with the chronic absentees and their parents they believed that excessive absence was most often due to inadequate parental supervision and involvement. The Attendance Teachers believed that broken homes, large families, or working parents were contributing factors in students' poor attendance at school. Every one of the Community Workers felt that parents, in one way or another, were the key to school attendance. The Community Workers noted that although several parents they had contacted were not aware of the child's poor attendance record, when made aware they were most cooperative and willing to come to school to confer with attendance teachers. Many parents, reported the Community Workers, were very thankful that the school was concerned and interested.

Both the Task Force Attendance Teachers and the Community Workers cited the school experience of these youngsters as having played a role in the formation of negative attitudes toward school attendance. The irrelevancy of the curriculum, repeated academic failure, and poor basic skills were believed to be reasons why these students "turned off" school.

Peer influence was also given as a factor which encouraged absence. Other factors mentioned by personnel interviewed included illness, drug addiction, immaturity, travel distance from the school, and the teachers' strike this year as contributing to excessive absence.

Opinions of Regular School Personnel

The evaluators also asked the school principal and the school attendance teacher what their opinions were concerning chronic absenteeism.

The school attendance teacher concurred with the project staff. He felt that when parents work during the day, students use the house as a hangout. In many instances even concerned parents are not aware of this. He indicated that this factor is often a concomitant of poor school attendance as are broken homes, illness, financial need, and peer influence which is very strong in the high-school-age group.

The principal of the school felt that in both the white and black lower-middle-class communities, an educational orientation -- and hence attendance at school -- was not given priority over other activities. Most of the students, he reported, do not continue their education; only 15 percent of the entire student body goes to an academic college.

In his opinion students from the non-contiguous poverty area neighborhood, which was added to the school zone two years ago, are even less committed to an academic high school education than the lower middle class students in the nearby neighborhood areas. The principal also speculated that distance from the school and inadequate transportation facilities served as additional deterrents for these children.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

Opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Attendance Task Force project were obtained by questionnaire and interview with the Task Force Personnel, and by interviewing the regular school attendance staff.

All the personnel agreed that the major strength of the project was the direct contact made, at home or at school, with parents and chronic absentees. The Community Workers reported that parents usually were cordial, friendly, and cooperative. In most instances parents came to school willingly to confer with the Attendance Teacher. The Attendance Teacher felt that the conferences with the parents and students were very productive in returning many absentees to schools.

The school attendance personnel reported that the project staff was able to reach absentees that they could not get to. They believed that the Attendance Task Force personnel were able to weed out "dead" registrants (i.e., those students that could have been discharged if information about them was available, but who were carried on the rollbooks and who became labeled chronic absentees). Thus, the school attendance staff could devote more of their time to working with those

students who might return. They indicated that they had heard favorable reports about the project from parents, teachers, and chronic absentees.

Weaknesses pointed out by the Community Workers were that there was excessive paper work; no clerical or secretarial assistance; inaccessible school records which made the screening procedures difficult and time-consuming; inadequate information about the chronic absentees they were to visit; ineffective methods used to contact chronic absentees; and not enough provision for followup visits. The Attendance Teachers agreed, and added that the project was set up without sufficient time for training the staff and for orienting the other teachers in the school.

Both project staff and regular school staff reported a lack of coordination in activities resulting from poor communication between them. The school attendance staff felt that the Task Force personnel lacked adequate understanding of school procedures. This could be improved with better planning in the future.

All personnel made suggestions for improving the project; many of these suggestions are included in the following section of the report.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the operation of a demonstration school attendance project and to determine its effectiveness in reducing chronic absenteeism and in returning the potential dropouts to school. The Attendance Task Force project was designed to operate in one academic high school for a short period of time. There were severe limitations in the kinds of data which could be collected in the time alloted for the evaluation, and therefore limitations in the conclusions which can be drawn from the study. Nevertheless, certain tentative conclusions can be presented; all conclusions should be interpreted in the light of the experimental nature of the Attendance Task Force project.

The deteriorating trend in attendance and the growing numbers of chronic absentees warranted the placement of the Attendance Task Force project in this high school.

The Task Force personnel carried out their duties to individualize and intensify services to chronic absentees 16 years old or older. They reached and processed 423, or 80 percent, of the 526 cases of chronic absenteeism in this age group.

There was a significant improvement in attendance for the chronic absentees in the sample group during the three-month period following Task Force intervention, but the extent to which this improvement was attributable to Task Force services alone could not be determined from the data collected for this study.

The Task Force and school personnel believed that chronic absenteeism was related to such factors as lack of parental supervision, poor academic achievement, peer influences, and personal problems.

The major strength of the project, as reported by the personnel involved, lay in the direct contacts with chronic absentees and their parents; some of its weaknesses were attributable to its brief duration and experimental nature.

The following recommendations, if implemented, should result in a better organized and more effective project.

It would be desirable if the Attendance Task Force project could operate over a full term starting in September or in February of the school year.

If funds permit, it is recommended that the services of the Task Force be extended to all chronic absentees in the high school, rather than concentrated on the older ones. Chronic absenteeism, although perhaps less severe in younger students, may nevertheless be recognizable. Since students 17 years old, or 16 years old with employment certificates, are not required to continue in high school, services to these older groups may offer less payoff than services at earlier ages.

A small attendance task unit should precede the full Task Force into the school by at least one week to (a) hold conferences with school personnel to orient the school staff to the purposes, philosophy, objectives, mode of operation, and the working relationships of the program; (b) prepare the physical facilities and the lines of communication required for a smooth operation; and (c) familiarize themselves

with the school's procedures and introduce screening procedures for the selection of the target population. At the conclusion of the project, it might be desirable for such a small unit of the Attendance Task Force -- perhaps one Attendance Teacher and three Community Workers -- to remain in the school for a period of time sufficient to train and supplement the regular school attendance staff in performing services for students with chronic attendance problems.

Followup procedures with returnees, both at home and in school, should be formalized and intensified.

It is recommended further that the Task Force personnel be expanded to include an assistant director and clerical and secretarial assistants. If an attendance teacher trained in group counseling were added, he could investigate the causes of chronic absenteeism more fully, and attempt to alleviate those that are amenable to change. Also, a ratio of one attendance teacher to each three (instead of five) Community Workers would enable the Attendance Teacher to handle the case load.

In general, the Attendance Task Force personnel were successful in identifying the chronic absentees in the school, and in making a formal disposition of the 526 cases involving students 16 years old and older. The success of the project in returning chronic absentees to school could not be inferred from the data. There is some indication, based on a selected sample of students under supervision, that the project did succeed in reducing absenteeism for a short time during its operation. A real measure of the project's effectiveness would be a study using proper controls which provided for some longitudinal followup information about the chronic absentees.

APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENTS

	Page
Bureau of Attendance Questionnaire	B1
Supervising Attendance Officer Questionnaire	B3
School Supervising Attendance Officer Questionnaire	B5
Attendance Teacher Questionnaire	B8
Community Liaison Trainee Questionnaire	B11

Center for Urban Education

Attendance Task Force to Strengthen High School Attendance Programs

BUREAU OF ATTENDANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Completed by ..... Date .....

Position at the Bureau of Attendance .....

How long with the Bureau of Attendance .....

Qualifications for position .....

Relationship to Attendance Task Force Project .....

.....

Selection of John Adams High School for pilot study - Reasons

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Date Project was initiated at John Adams High School _____

Date Project will terminate at John Adams High School _____

Personnel planned for Task Force _____

_____

Personnel currently operating in Task Force _____

_____

Reasons for changes in personnel of Task Force _____

_____

Other changes in the implementation of the Project _____

_____

Problems encountered in implementing Project _____

_____

Achievement of Project to date _____

_____

_____

Other pertinent information related to the Project:

Center for Urban Education

Attendance Task Force to Strengthen High School Attendance Programs

DISTRICT 27 SUPERVISING ATTENDANCE OFFICER QUESTIONNAIRE

Completed by _____ Date _____

How long in present position _____ How long with Bureau of Attendance _____

Qualifications for present position _____

Relationship to Attendance Task Force Project _____

Responsibilities to Project _____

_____

Please provide the following information about John Adams High School for the past five years:

	1964-65	1965-66	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69
School Population No. of Pupils					
Ethnic Composition Percentages: P.R.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Negro	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Others					
Attendance: Percentages: School					
City Wide					
Number of Discharges Totals					
17 plus					
Employment Certif.					
Pupil Turnover Percentages:					
School Zone Neighborhoods					

	1964-65	1965-66	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69
No. of Chronic Absentees					
Length of day No. of Periods					
Attendance Personnel					

Your activities in connection with Project :

Problems in implementing Project:

Achievements of Project to date:

Other information pertinent to the Project:

Center for Urban Education

Attendance Task Force to Strengthen High School Attendance Programs

SCHOOL SUPERVISING ATTENDANCE OFFICER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ School _____ Date _____

When assigned to Project _____ Qualifications _____

Previous experience: No. of yrs. with Bureau of Attendance _____

Position and school _____

Responsibilities to Project _____

_____

Activities in connection with Project:

Problems encountered in implementing Project:

Achievements of Project to date:

Future plans for Project:

Personnel: Project Attendance Teachers

Names	Date of Assignment	Previous Experience
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Description of Activities of Attendance Teachers

Community Liaison Trainees

Names	Date of Assignment	Source of Employment	Previous Experience
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			

Description of Activities of Community Liaison Trainees

Other pertinent information related to the Project:

For each of the following activities of the Attendance Task Force, indicate the number of kinds of personnel used, the time devoted to the activity and the number of cases processed to date:

Activity	No. and kinds of personnel	Time devoted in days	No. of cases
1. Identifying chronic absentees from roll books			
2. Identifying chronic absentees from other sources			
3. Reviewing students' cumulative record and health cards			
4. Writing letters to chronic absentees and their parents for planning conferences in school			
5. Telephone calls to chronic absentees and their parents			
6. Visits to the homes of chronic absentees and their parents			
7. School conferences with chronic absentees and their parents			
8. Follow-up school conferences			
9. Follow-up home conferences			
10. Letters to locate and help over-17-year-old chronic absentees			
11. Conferences with school personnel for returnees			
12. Returnees			
13. Referrals to Bureau of Attendance (a) under 17 (b) over 17			
14. Conferences with District Supervisor			
15. Conferences with Bureau of Attendance			
16. Other activities			

Center for Urban Education

Attendance Task Force to Strengthen High School Attendance Programs

ATTENDANCE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ Sex: M F Date _____
Print last name first, then first name

Marital Status _____. If married, number and age of children _____

Education: Circle last grade completed College 1 2 3 4 Degree _____ University 1 2 3 4 Degree _____

No. of years with Bureau of Attendance _____ When assigned to Project (date) _____

Previous experience: School _____ Years _____ Position ____

Please indicate the number of students processed by you in each of the following activities and the approximate amount of time devoted to the activity:

Activity	Total No. Students	Amt. of time in days
1. Identifying chronic absentees from roll books	_____	_____
2. Reviewing students' cumulative records and health cards	_____	_____
3. Writing letters to chronic absentees	_____	_____
4. Telephone calls to chronic absentees	_____	_____
5. Home visits to chronic absentees	_____	_____
6. School conferences with chronic absentees and their parents	_____	_____
a. Number responding to initial conference _____		
b. Number responding to followup conferences _____		
7. Conferences with returnees	_____	_____
a. One conference _____		
b. Followup conferences _____		
8. Conferences with School personnel	_____	_____
9. Referrals to Bureau of Attendance	_____	_____
10. Other activities: list below	_____	_____

10. Other activities	Total No. Students	Amt. of time in days
a. Followup with parents	_____	_____
b. Individual conferences with community liaison trainees	_____	_____
c. Annual conference	_____	_____
d. Evaluation of project	_____	_____
e. Planning conferences with District Office supervisor	_____	_____
f. Record keeping	_____	_____
g. Discharges	_____	_____
1. Over 17	_____	_____
2. Employment Certificate	_____	_____
3. Not found	_____	_____
4. Transfer to other schools in city	_____	_____
5. Attending other schools outside city	_____	_____

In the space in front of each of the following, please put a check if you received any assistance in carrying out your function on the Task Force and in the space that follows indicate the specific help you received

_____1. School Supervising Attendance Office:

_____2. District Attendance Officer (supervisor):

_____3. Bureau of Attendance:

_____4. School Guidance Personnel:

_____5. School Administrative Staff:

_____6. School Teaching Personnel:

_____7. Outside Agencies ( ):

_____8. Others ( ):

Which of your activities on the Task Force appear to be most effective? Explain

Which activities appear to be ineffective? Why?

What are your recommendations for improving the work of the Task Force?

What is your overall evaluation of the Task Force Project to date?

Excellent Good Fair Poor Worthless

Comments:

Center for Urban Education

Attendance Task Force to Strengthen High School Attendance Programs

COMMUNITY LIAISON TRAINEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ Sex: M F Date _____
Print last name first, then first name

Home Address _____Boro _____ Zone _____ Phone _____

Marital Status _____. If married, number of children and age _____

Education: Circle last grade of school completed 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18
element. secondary-h.s. college and graduate

Date of employment on Project _____No. of working days on project to date ___

Previous employment:

Please indicate the number of students involved in each of the following activities and the approximate time devoted to the activity.

Activity	Total No. Students	Amt. of Time in days
1. Identifying chronic absentees from roll books	_____	_____
2. Reviewing students' cumulative records and health cards	_____	_____
3. Writing letters to chronic absentees	_____	_____
a. Number of responses on first letter _____		
b. Number of responses on followup letter ___		
4. Telephone calls to chronic absentees	_____	_____
a. Number responding to initial call _____		
b. Number responding to followup call _____		
5. Home visits to chronic absentees	_____	_____
a. Number responding to initial visit _____		
b. Number responding to following visit _____		
6. Letters to chronic absentees over 17 years old	_____	_____
a. Number responding to initial letter _____		
b. Number responding to followup letter _____		
7. Other activities - list below		

7. Other Activities	Total No. Students	Amt. of Time in days
a. Escorted workers	_____	_____
b. Clerical work on problem cases	_____	_____
c. Annual conference	_____	_____
d. Preparation of mimeo sheets	_____	_____
e. Construction of case folders and intake cards	_____	_____
f. Daily attendance check	_____	_____
g. Answering telephone-switchboard	_____	_____
h. Typing	_____	_____
i. Work on project evaluation	_____	_____
j. Conference with Attendance Teacher	_____	_____
k. Orientation conference	_____	_____
l. Record keeping	_____	_____

Place a check in front of the source from which you received any assistance in carrying out your function on the Task Force and in the space that follows indicate the specific help you received:

_____1. School Supervising Attendance Officer:

_____2. District Supervising Attendance Officer:

_____3. Bureau of Attendance:

_____4. School Guidance Personnel:

_____5. School Administrative Staff:

_____6. School Teaching Personnel:

_____7. Outside Agencies: Indicate which one

_____8. Outside Individuals: Indicate who

_____9. Neighborhood organizations:

____10. Others:

Which of your activities on the Task Force appear to be most effective? Why?

Which of your activities appear to be ineffective? Why?

What are your recommendations for improving the work of the Task Force?

What is your overall evaluation of the Task Force to date?

Excellent Good Fair Poor Worthless

Comments:

APPENDIX C

STAFF LIST

Edward Frankel, Evaluation Director
Associate Professor of Education and
Director of Institutional Research
Herbert H. Lehman College
The City University of New York